

# The Near Eastern Problem

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## Will War Solve It?

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*(Written by a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and issued by the Executive Committee to encourage further thought and action on the part of Fellowship members.)*

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Many earnest inquirers have been asking what should be the attitude of Christians on the Near Eastern question. Some of these inquiries come from those who frankly believe that to keep the Turk out of Europe is to fight God's battle against the oppressor. Therefore, they say it is the solemn duty of Christians to urge the American Government to resort to any necessary measure, even war itself, in the regulation of the Turks and the protection of Christian missionaries.

We should be blind if we did not recognize the moral passion behind this point of view. We join most heartily in the plea for generous relief to the destitute and afflicted. We believe that the American Government ought to use the whole of its moral weight as the disinterested friend of all peoples in the Near East to end strife and obtain the protection of minorities. To that end the United States might well be represented at the Near East Conference in an advisory capacity. Our usefulness then will be precisely in proportion to the genuineness and disinterestedness of our friendship for the various parties and our freedom from imperialist intrigue.†

But by so much as we agree that we cannot turn from our brethren in the Near East with Cain's excuse "Am I my brother's keeper?" by so much do we insist that war is not the way to justice or to peace. A study of the tragedy of the Near East only confirms our belief—which lies at the very heart of our Christian faith—that war cannot be the cure for murder, far less the means of establishing a peace of good will.

American Christians who are now advocating war against the Turk ought to remember that the logic of such a position cuts at the

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†See, for instance, the opinion expressed by so conservative a writer as Herbert Adams Gibbons in a letter to the N. Y. Times, Oct. 14, 1922.

root of the Christian movement in favor of disarmament. One cannot escape this dilemma by saying with Bishop Cannon that a war with Turkey would not be much of a war. No one knows. It might very likely involve most of Europe. Let us think clearly on this matter. The advocates of the duty of the United States to police the Near East cannot be taken seriously when they talk of disarmament. We must find another way.

From the very outset we must think soberly. The Turks are not devils but men. As men, even as soldiers, they have won the respect of many who have lived among them and have fought against them. They have not made a success as a constructive governing race and they are subject to a religious fanaticism which often sweeps them into cruelty and results in massacres and other atrocities. But concerning these atrocities certain things are to be observed. The present atrocities sprang out of war conditions and are inseparable from those conditions. Without attempting to apportion the blame for the situation today, we must remember that the Greeks, as well as the other Balkan nations, have had black records whenever they have had the upper hand.

Nor can we be blind to the fact that behind the wars, atrocities and counter-atrocities in the Near East lies the imperialist intrigue of the great powers. A missionary in Salonica put the matter thus: "If France, England and the other powers would let us alone I should not despair of effecting peace and a growing measure of understanding between Greeks and Turks." Into the causes of this imperialist rivalry we shall not go. They were well stated in a recent article by Arnold Toynbee in the *New Republic*.<sup>\*</sup> After the war the Near Eastern question might have been settled. The chance was thrown away by the diplomatic intrigues, the desire for oil, concessions, and strategic position. These were the things that gave impetus to the revival of Turkish military power. How could the United States end them by plunging into war? In such a tragic situation it is poor diagnosis which sees all the fault in the diabolism of the Turks.

But even if the diagnosis were right, war would be no healing surgery but a ghastly infliction of new wounds. It would mean that American boys would be cajoled or conscripted from farms and workshops to fight in quarrels they do not understand. It would mean subjecting them to the continuing atrocity of war, out of which lesser atrocities are born. To keep up the fighting spirit we should be fed

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<sup>\*</sup>New Republic, Oct. 11, 1922. Toynbee, Arnold. British Near Eastern Policy.

with propaganda; and only later, after the war is over and the harm done, would some new Philip Gibbs dare to tell the truth that could not be told before. Suppose America were victorious. The peace she imposed by force would have to be preserved by force. What force would be required to perform that task?

The matter may be made clear by an illustration. The lot of Negroes in the United States has some resemblance to the lot of racial minorities in the Near East. In America racial minorities are persecuted, at times most savagely. The race riots in Chicago, Omaha, East St. Louis, and the many horrible lynchings, where men only suspected of crime are burnt at the stake, constitute atrocities most brutal and unjustifiable. Yet it would never occur to the most earnest advocates of American intervention in Eastern affairs, to advocate a French invasion of the United States to secure the rights of a colored minority. The solution of our American racial problem will arise from deeper, more fundamental changes than foreign bayonets can effect. Is it not so in the Near East?

This brings us to the heart of our problem. Mohammed's way was the way of the sword. Jesus' way was that of love. Christians have in this matter followed not Jesus but the prophet of the sword. For centuries the wars of Moslems and Christians have stood square across the onward march of humanity. Mohammed's way has been tried by his friends and his foes alike for thirteen centuries and we are where we are today. Is not the challenge to the church a challenge to try Jesus' way?

Are we asked to tell just what this would mean? Some things we can answer.† Some things we admit we cannot answer. The devils of prejudice, hate and vengeance are not easily cast out. But this we know—our methods of bringing in the Kingdom of God must be consistent with the Kingdom itself. The experience of the Friends in Germany bears witness to the power of these methods. We have spent millions for the relief of the Armenians, the Greeks and others of the oppressed races. Let us redouble these endeavors, but let us also do our utmost to relieve the Turkish sufferers and help them rehabilitate their war-curst land. If we would deal with them in the spirit of reconciliation—and for us there is no other way—we must bow in contrition for ourselves and our country. In the spirit of penitence we must seek to apprehend the underlying causes of national

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†See *The World To-Morrow*, Jan. and Nov., 1922. Both numbers, including references for further reading and for group discussion, are devoted to kindred questions.

selfishness, racial hatreds and economic rivalries, which lead to war. We must seek, too, a more vital understanding of God's purpose for all men, by no means excluding the Turks, for the God revealed by Jesus "hath made of one blood all nations of men."

All this must enlist the best thought and prayer and practice of Christians. But we have the promise of Him who said, "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching." His will we know. As we do it we shall gain wisdom for our tasks. Only when Christians deliberately renounce war will they find a substitute for war.

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*The address of the Near East Relief is 149 Fifth Avenue, New York City.*

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*The Fellowship of Reconciliation unites in a spiritual unity men and women in this and other lands who are seeking a better social order in harmony with the principles and spirit of Jesus. It is founded in the faith that love, as revealed in the life, teachings and death of Jesus Christ, is not only the fundamental basis of a true human society, but the effective power for overcoming evil and calling forth the undiscovered good in men.*

*For further information about the Fellowship or additional copies of this leaflet address*

*The Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation,  
396 Broadway, New York City.*

